

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 PARIS 29418

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE -- NOVEMBER

REFS: (A) PARIS 27779; (B) PARIS 28251; (C) PARIS

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SUMMARY. NOVEMBER WASAN UNHAPPY MONTH FOR FRANCE. IN

THE FACE OF PERSISTING INFLATION, UNEMPLOYMENT AND BUSINESS UNCERTAINTY, FRENCH WORKERS REACTED WITH SCATTERED BUT GENERALLY INEFFECTIVE STRIKES. AT VARIOUS TIMES DURING THE MONTH, FRENCHMEN FOUND THEIR LIGHTS FLICKERING OUT, TELEVISION SCREENS BLANK, NEWSPAPER KIOSKS CLOSED, AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SLOWED. EVERYONE'S MAIL BOX WAS EMPTY THROUGHOUT THE MONTH. LEFTIST POLITICIANS PUBLICLY SQUABBLED AND RAISED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE UNION OF THE LEFT, AND MICHEL JOBERT'S WASPISH CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT CONTINUED TO ATTRACT ATTENTION. THE PRESS CRITICIZED GISCARD FOR NOT PAYING ENOUGH ATTENTION TO HIS WORK, AND THE PRESIDENT RESPONDED WITH A TELEVISION ADDRESS' LUKE-WARMLY RECEIVED, ASKING THE PEOPLE TO TIGHTEN THEIR BELTS UNTIL THE GOVERNMENT'S AUSTERITY PROGRAM CURBED INFLATION. GISCARD WON A VICTORY WITH THE PASSAGE OF HIS ABORTION REFORM BILL, BUT AT NOVEMBER'S END, THE WORSENING ECONOMY AND THE GOVERNMENT'S SEEMING INABILITY TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT' REMAINED THE CRITICAL ISSUES IN FRANCE. END SUMMARY.

1. ECONOMY IN SLOWDOWN. THE CONTINUING ECONOMIC SLUMP DOMINATED EVENTS IN NOVEMBER. THE GOVERNMENT'S ANTI-INFLATIONARY PROGRAM HAD SHOWN ONLY LIMITED SUCCESS IN CURBING PRICE INCREASES, STILL AT AN ANNUAL RATE OF OVER 15 PERCENT, WHILE TIGHT-MONEY POLICIES HAD BEGUN TO SERIOUSLY HAMPER BUSINESS ACTIVITY. DEPRESSED CONDITIONS IN AUTOMOBILES, TEXTILES, CONSTRUCTION AND ELSEWHERE HAD CAUSED TWO SUCCESSIVE MONTHS OF MARKEDLY INCREASED UNEMPLOYMENT' WHICH STOOD AT AROUND 630,000 IN NOVEMBER. THE POSTAL STRIKE PUT EXTRA PRESSURE ON FIRMS DEPENDENT ON ORDERS AND PAYMENTS RECEIVED BY MAIL, AND, ACCORDING TO THE GOVERNMENT, MAY HAVE PUT AN ADDITIONAL 60,000 OUT OF WORK. LAYOFFS ANNOUNCED DURING NOVEMBER IN HARD-HIT SECTORS SHOULD FURTHER SWELL JOBLESS FIGURES. THE GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO DEFEND THE SOUNDNESS OF ITS ECONOMIC POLICIES, INSISTING THAT ITS GOALS FOR SLOWING INFLATION AND IMPROVING FRANCE'S TRADE BALANCE WILL BE MET. HOWEVER, CONTINUATION OF THESE POLICIES WITHOUT ALTERATION IS DIFFICULT
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TO SQUARE WITH THE INCREASED EMPHASIS GOF HAS RECENTLY GIVEN TO MAINTAIN HIGH EMPLOYMENT. FINANCE MINISTER FOURCADE HAS INDICATED THAT SOME EASING OF CREDIT RESTRICTIONS MAY TAKE PLACE EARLY NEXT YEAR.

2. SCATTERED STRIKES PLAGUE FRANCE. LABOR RESPONDED WITH A NUMBER OF SCATTERED STRIKES, WHICH PETERED OUT WITHOUT THE STRIKERS GAINING THEIR FULL DEMANDS. (REFS

A AND B). ON NOVEMBER 4, 20,000 STRIKING LORRAINE COAL MINERS VOTED TO "SUSPEND" THEIR STRIKE AFTER THE GOVERNMENT PROMISED INCREASED CONSULTATIONS OVER PRODUCTION GOALS. SCATTERED NEIGHBORHOODS IN PARIS AND OTHER CITIES WERE TEMPORARILY DARKENED NOVEMBER 5 BY THE PROTESTS OF ELECTRICAL WORKERS. ON THE SAME DAY, AND AGAIN ON NOVEMBER 19, THERE WERE SELECTIVE RAIL SLOW-DOWNS THROUGHOUT FRANCE. A ONE-DAY PRINTERS' ACTION NOVEMBER 13 RESULTED IN A DAY WITHOUT NEWSPAPERS (PERHAPS A BLESSING, AS FOR ONE DAY THERE WAS NO BAD NEWS TO READ). FRENCH RADIO AND TELEVISION WENT ON REDUCED PROGRAMMING BECAUSE OF AN ON-AND-OFF STRIKE PROTESTING THE GOVERNMENT'S ORTF REORGANIZATION PLAN

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WHICH WILL ELIMINATE THE JOBS OF 261 JOURNALISTS.

A "NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION" CALLED BY THE TWO LARGEST
LABOR UNIONS NOVEMBER 19 WAS ONLY A PARTIAL SUCCESS;
PUBLIC TRANSPORT SLOWED, SOME SHOPS CLOSED, AND SOME
WORKERS STAYED HOME OR JOINED AN IMPRESSIVE 200,000-
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STRONG MARCH FROM THE BASTILLE TO THE GARE DE L'EST.
IN GENERAL, HOWEVER, DAILY LIFE WAS LITTLE DISRUPTED,
AND THE GENERAL STRIKE FELL FAR SHORT OF ITS GOAL.

3. THE SIX-WEEK POSTAL STRIKE, MOST ANNOYING OF ALL,
CAME TO AN END DECEMBER 2 IN TIME FOR CHRISTMAS MAIL
TO BE PROCESSED. THE STRIKING MAIL SORTERS GAVE IN AND
RETURNED TO THE JOB WITHOUT FULLY ATTAINING THEIR GOALS
OF IMPROVED WORK CONDITIONS THROUGH MORE JOBS AT HIGHER
PAY. THE GOVERNMENT OFFERED SOME IMPROVEMENTS IN
WORKING CONDITIONS (TO COST 500 MILLION FRANCS ANNUALLY)
AND 4,000 NEW PTT JOBS ALREADY ALLOTTED IN THE 1975
BUDGET, BUT OTHERWISE HELD THE LINE.

4. LABOR SITUATION REMAINS UNSTABLE. THAT THE
GENERAL STRIKE FAILED TO TAKE HOLD AND THE SCATTERED,
WILDCAT STRIKES ENDED SHORT OF THEIR GOALS MIGHT BE
INTERPRETED AS A GOVERNMENT VICTORY. CERTAINLY, THE
GOVERNMENT HAD SHOWN ITS DETERMINATION TO HOLD TO ITS
AUSTERITY PROGRAM. BUT THIS "VICTORY" COULD BE SHORT-
LIVED. THE UNION LEADERSHIP SEEMS LESS AND LESS IN
COMMAND; RANK AND FILE WORKERS -- MANY OF THEM, LIKE
THE MAIL SORTERS, MORE RADICAL THAN THEIR
LEADERS -- ARE TAKING THE INITIATIVE IN STARTING AND
HALTING STRIKES. THERE APPEARS TO BE LESS ROOM FOR THE
UNIONS TO MANEUVER, LESS OPPORTUNITY FOR THE GOVERNMENT
TO NEGOTIATE CONTRACTS WHICH WILL STICK. THE LABOR FRONT
IS INCREASINGLY COMBUSTIBLE AND UNPREDICTABLE.

5. JOBERT KEEPS HIMSELF IN THE NEWS. POLITICIANS,
PERHAPS UNFORTUNATELY, CANNOT GO ON STRIKE. BUT
FRANCE'S ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTIES ARE WONDEROUSLY
MANIFESTING THEMSELVES IN THE POLITICAL WORLD. THE

JOBERT PHENOMENON (SEPTEL) FOR EXAMPLE, MAY BE SEEN IN THIS CONTEXT. A LEADING FRENCH NEWSWEEKLY NOT LONG AGO CALLED FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER MICHEL JOBERT "THE NEW CACTUS." CERTAINLY, JOBERT'S OFT-EXPRESSED PRICKLY VIEWS HAVE KEPT HIM IN THE NEWS. NEWSPAPERS FIND HIM GOOD COPY, AND JOBERT'S APOLOGY, "MEMOIRS OF THE FUTURE," RANKS NUMBER TWO ON THE BEST-SELLER LIST. JOBERT'S CAUSTIC CRITICISMS OF GISCARD'S POLICIES --
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USUALLY ACCOMPANIED BY EXPRESSIONS OF MISTRUST OF THE US AND BY GAULLIST EVOCATIONS OF FRANCE'S INDEPENDENCE AND DIGNITY -- HAVE ATTRACTED A FEW UDR DEPUTIES DISCHANTED WITH THEIR PLACE IN THE NEW MAJORITY. JOBERT HAS WON THE SYMPATHY OF THE YOUNG GAULLIST ORGANIZATION (NOW BROKEN FROM THE PARENT PARTY) AND IS FISHING FOR SUPPORT IN THE LEFT-CENTER. A NUMBER OF JOBERTIAN "COMMITTEES OF SUPPORT" HAVE SPRUNG UP IN FRANCE. JOBERT HAS ABLY DEMONSTRATED HIS ABILITY TO ATTRACT ATTENTION BUT THE DEPTH OF HIS SUPPORT CANNOT BE MEASURED. THUS FAR, HE HAS AVOIDED ADVANCING A CONCRETE, ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM TO THAT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S (AND GIVING HIS OPPONENTS A CHANCE TO FOCUS ON HIM). LACKING A PATRON IN POWER AND, AT LEAST FOR THE TIME BEING, A CHANCE TO TEST HIS PERSONALITY AND IDEAS AT THE POLLS, JOBERT IS MAKING THE MOST OF HIS OPPORTUNITIES AS A CRITIC. FOR THE MOMENT, IT IS TOO EARLY TO TELL WHETHER THIS NEW CACTUS WILL TAKE ROOT AND GROOR WILL FADE AWAY, A SEASONAL WEED IN THE FRENCH POLITICAL GARDEN.

6. STEHLIN'S REPORT CAUSES BRIEF SENSATION. THE "STEHLIN AFFAIR" ALSO REFLECTS THE CURRENT UNCERTAINTIES IN FRENCH LIFE (REFS C AND D). IN SEPTEMBER, GENERAL PAUL STEHLIN, A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY VICE-PRESIDENT AND A FORMER AIR FORCE CHIEF OF STAFF, WROTE A MEMO FOR GISCARD ARGUING THAT THE MIRAGE F1/M53 WAS TECHNICALLY INFERIOR TO ITS AMERICAN COMPETITORS IN THE RACE TO REPLACE THE F-104 IN THE NATO AIR INVENTORY. STEHLIN WENT ON TO SAY THAT FRANCE'S DEFENSE MIGHT BE BETTER SERVED BY MORE COOPERATION AND LESS COMPETITION WITH THE AMERICANS. IN EARLY NOVEMBER, THE MEMO WAS LEAKED TO THE PRESS -- SOME SAY BY PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC, WHO HAD CALCULATED THAT THE REACTION WOULD REBOUND FAVORABLY TO THE UDR -- AND CAUSED A SENSATION. STEHLIN WAS DENOUNCED AS A TRAITOR AND A SERVANT TO US INTERESTS. FORMER PRIME MINISTER MESSMER SAID HE WOULD REFUSE TO SIT IN THE ASSEMBLY WHEN STEHLIN WAS PRESIDING. GISCARD CALLED THE INCIDENT "DETRIMENTAL TO OUR

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DEFENSE", AND LATER HAD STEHLIN TAKEN OFF THE ACTIVE
AIR FORCE RESERVE LIST. A BATTERED AND EMBITTERED STEH-
LIN RESIGNED FROM THE ASSEMBLY VICE PRESIDENCY AND FROM
THE REFORMER PARLIAMENTARY GROUP, BUT KEPT HIS SEAT
AS A DEPUTY. ALTHOUGH THE UPROAR SOON DIED DOWN, THE
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QUESTION REMAINED: WHY WAS STEHLIN SO VEHEMENTLY ATTACKED? HIS ATLANTICIST VIEWS WERE WIDELY-KNOWN, AND FEW HAVE ATTACKED THE TECHNICAL ARGUMENTS SET FORTH IN HIS PAPER. WE BELIEVE THAT THE INTENSITY OF THE REACTION TO THE STEHLIN LETTER IS SUGGESTIVE OF A CERTAIN MALAISE IN FRANCE ACCENTUATED BY THE CURRENT ECONOMIC DOLDRUMS. KNOWLEDGEABLE FRENCHMEN HAVE ALREADY CONCLUDED THAT THERE PROBABLY WILL BE NO EUROPEAN MARKET FOR THE MIRAGE F1/M53, A PLANE THAT EVEN THE FRENCH AIR FORCE IS RELUCTANT TO BUY. EVEN SO, STEHLIN'S REPORT, CONFIRMING THAT FRANCE HAS NEITHER THE TECHNOLOGICAL EXPERTISE NOR THE POLITICAL WEIGHT TO SIGNIFICANTLY PENETRATE THE EUROPEAN AIR DEFENSE MARKET, WAS A BITTER PILL FOR FRENCH POLITICIANS TO SWALLOW IN PUBLIC. THE PRESENT ECONOMIC TURNDOWN APPEARS TO PUT THE GAULLIST DREAM, STILL DEAR TO MANY PATRIOTS, OF A FRANCE RICH CONFIDE POWERFUL AND THE LEADER OF EUROPE, EVEN FURTHER FROM REALITY.

7. THE LEFT CONTINUES TO BICKER. COMMUNISTS AND SOCIALISTS CONTINUED TO SQUABBLE PUBLICLY OVER EACH OTHER'S CONDUCT AND MOTIVES, THOUGH THE UNITED LEFT SHOWED NO SIGNS OF BREAKING UP. WHILE BOTH PARTIES HAD STATED IN THE PAST THEY WOULD ACCEPT ENTRANCE INTO THE GOVERNMENT AS THE RESULT OF LEGISLATIVE VICTORIES, THE PCF FEARS THAT FRANCOIS MITTERRAND WOULD ACCEPT A CALL FROM GISCARD TO ENTER THE GOVERNMENT AS PRIME MINISTER. (ON DECEMBER 5 PCF SECRETARY GENERAL MARCHAIS SAID THAT THE PCF WOULD ONLY COME INTO GOVERNMENT TO APPLY THE COMMON PROGRAM -- THUS LEAVING NEATLY UNANSWERED THE QUESTION OF WHETHER IT WOULD RES-

POND TO A CALL FROM GISCARD). THE SOCIALISTS, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAVE EMERGED AS THE STRONGEST PARTY IN THE UNITED LEFT; THEIR LEADERS APPEAR TO FEAR THAT THE COMMUNISTS, JEALOUS OF THIS TURN OF EVENTS, ARE TRYING TO DISCREDIT THE PS AS A LEGITIMATE WORKERS' PARTY.

8. INTERIOR MINISTER PONIATOWSKI MAY HAVE BEEN TRYING TO PLAY ON THESE DIFFERENCES IN THE LEFT, WHEN HE CHARACTERIZED IN OCTOBER THE COMMUNISTS AS A "FASCIST
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AND TOTALITARIAN" PARTY. THIS BROUGHT A BRIEF, IF DELAYED, SALLY FROM MOSCOW, WHICH IN PRAVDA NOVEMBER

18 CHARACTERIZED PONIATOWSKI'S SPEECH AS "SLANDEROUS" AND "UNFRIENDLY" TO THE SOVIET UNION. DESPITE INTEREST SHOWN BY PRAVDA IN THIS FRENCH INTERNAL POLITICAL ISSUE, WE BELIEVE THAT THE MAJOR ELEMENT OF PCF-PS TENSION IS PCF DETERMINATION TO PRESERVE ITS IDENTITY AND REGAIN GROUND LOST TO THE SOCIALISTS OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS, RATHER THAN ANY ATTEMPT BY THE SOVIETS TO DICTATE POLICY. NEVERTHELESS, A NUMBER OF RESPECTED OBSERVERS HERE CLAIM THE SOVIETS HAVE PASSED THE WORD THAT POPULAR FRONT GOVERNMENTS IN WESTERN EUROPE, WITH COMMUNIST PARTIES IN MINORITY STATUS, ARE UNACCEPTABLE TO MOSCOW. REASONS FOR THE ALLEGED SOVIET ATTITUDE INCLUDE FEAR OF UPSETTING DETENTE, FEAR OF CONTAMINATION OF EASTERN EUROPEAN REGIMES, AND FEAR THAT SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES WILL GAIN THE UPPER HAND. IN ANY CASE, WE FORESEE NO EARLY END TO THE PCF-PS QUARREL, WHICH COULD INTENSIFY BEFORE THE SOCIALIST PARTY CONGRESS BEGINS JANUARY 31.

9. GISCARD AT THE BAR. CRITICISM BEGAN TO FOCUS ON THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF, AS THE PUBLIC APPEARED TO BE LOSING CONFIDENCE IN GISCARD'S ABILITY TO PULL FRANCE OUT OF THE ECONOMIC DOLDRUMS. FOR THE FIRST TIME, ACCORDING TO A POLL PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 23, PUBLIC SATISFACTION WITH GISCARD'S LEADERSHIP DIPPED BELOW 50 PERCENT; ANOTHER POLL INDICATED THAT 77 PERCENT OF THE PUBLIC THOUGHT THE ECONOMIC SITUATION WAS GOING TO WORSEN. THE PRESS, LED BY THE SATIRICAL CANARD ENCHAINE, CALLED ATTENTION TO GISCARD'S UNCONVENTIONAL NIGHT LIFE AND HIS HABIT OF SLIPPING AWAY FROM THE ELYSEE, ALLEGEDLY WITHOUT INFORMING AIDES OF HIS WHEREABOUTS. PERHAPS THE PRESIDENT, IT WAS SUGGESTED, WAS NOT PAYING ENOUGH ATTENTION TO HIS DOSSIERS. ONCE CHARACTERIZED AS A FINANCIAL GENIUS, GISCARD WAS NOW HINTED TO BE A LIGHTWEIGHT. THERE DID NOT APPEAR TO BE A CONCERTED PRESS ATTACK AGAINST GISCARD; THE PRESI-

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DENT'S PERSONAL HABITS HAD BEEN COMMON KNOWLEDGE FOR SOME TIME IN INNER GOVERNMENTAL CIRCLES, BUT ONCE ONE NEWSPAPER BROKE THE STORY, THE OTHERS HAD TO PICK IT UP. LE MONDE BUILT THESE RUMORS INTO A MAJOR POLICY ARTICLE WHICH CONCLUDED THAT GISCARD AND HIS FELLOW TECHNOCRATS
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APPEAR TO BE OUT OF TOUCH WITH POLITICAL REALITY -- A HARSH JUDGMENT NOT FULLY BORN OUT BY EVENTS, E.G., THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THE STRIKES. OTHER PAPERS DEFENDED THE RIGHT OF THE PRESIDENT TO HAVE A PRIVATE LIFE AND SOME RELAXATION AWAY FROM THE ELYSEE, AND SHOWED SOME SYMPATHY FOR VGE'S PLIGHT, FEELING THAT HE MUST BE THE VICTIM OF A POLITICALLY-MOTIVATED CAMPAIGN. NEVERTHELESS, SUCH PRESS COMMENTARY REFLECTS THE PUBLIC'S ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND THE PRESENT SITUATION AND TO ASSESS RESPONSIBILITY; IN A STRONG PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM, THE CHIEF OF STATE IS BOUND TO TAKE A LARGE SHARE

OF THE HEAT. IT IS PERHAPS ALSO EASIER TO BLAME ALLEGED FAILURES OF PERSONALITY THAN IT IS TO COMPREHEND AND GRAPPLE WITH THE DEEPER ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CAUSES OF THE RECESSION. AT PRESENT, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE RUMORS OF GISCARD'S PRIVATE LIFE HAVE SERIOUSLY HURT HIM POLITICALLY.

10. GISCARD SOUGHT TO DISPEL DOUBTS ABOUT HIS LEADERSHIP WITH A NATIONWIDE RADIO-TV ADDRESS NOVEMBER 26 (REF E). IN AN ADDRESS AS ELEGANT IN STYLE AS IT WAS SHORT ON SPECIFICS, GISCARD TRIED TO PROJECT THE IMAGE OF A SERIOUS PRESIDENT CONCERNED ABOUT THE PROBLEMS OF HIS PEOPLE AND WORKING HARD TO SOLVE THEM. HE ASKED THE PUBLIC TO TIGHTEN ITBELTAND REMAIN CONFIDENT THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S MEASURES TO CURB INFLATION WHILE MAINTAINING EMPLOYMENT WOULD TAKE HOLD. REACTION TO THE SPEECH RANGED FROM LUKEWARM AMONG THE PRESIDENT'S SUPPORTERS TO HOSTILE ONTHE LEFT. THE PUBLIC SEEMED TO BE WAITING FOR NEW AND CONCRETE INITIATIVES TO COMBAT THE CRISIS, INITIATIVES WHICH WERE NOT FORTHCOMING. CLEARLY, GISCARD WILL NEED MORE THAN FIRESIDE CHATS TO REKINDLE HIS COOLING POPULARITY WITH THE FRENCH PUBLIC.

11. ABORTION REFORM VOTED. MEANWHILE, THE PRESIDENT SCORED SOME SUCCESSES ON THE LEGISLATIVE FRONT. THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY APPROVED HIS GOVERNMENT'S BUDGET BY A COMFORTABLE MARGIN. MORE SIGNIFICANT WAS GISCARD'S VICTORY NOVEMBER 29 ON THE EMOTIONAL ABORTION REFORM ISSUE. ALTHOUGH THE PRESIDENT HAD PERSONALLY COMMITTED HIMSELF TO THE REFORM, WHICH WOULD

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OVERTURN A 1920 LAW OUTLAWING ABORTION ALTOGETHER AND WOULD PERMIT ABORTIONS UP TO THE TENTH WEEK OF PREGNANCY, MAJORITY DEPUTIES WERE TOLD TO VOTE THEIR CONSCIENCE. HEALTH MINISTER SIMONE VEIL PRESENTED THE GOVERNMENT'S CASE, SAYING THAT THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT FAVOR ABORTION BUT THAT SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE ABOUT THE 300,000 ILLEGAL ABORTIONS ANNUALLY CARRIED OUT IN FRANCE, MANY OF THEM UNDER CONDITIONS INJURIOUS TO THE PATIENT'S HEALTH. PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC WAS NOTABLY INACTIVE DURING THE DEBATE; LAST YEAR HE HAD LET IT BE KNOWN THAT HE WAS AGAINST LIBERALIZATION OF ABORTION. TWO FORMER GAULLIST MINISTERS LED THE OPPOSITION; JEAN FOYER ARGUED THAT ABORTION WAS MURDER AND MICHEL DEBRE CLAIMED THAT FRANCE OUGHT TO INCREASE HER BIRTHRATE AND NOT LEGALIZE A METHOD WHICH MIGHT REDUCE IT. AFTER THREE DAYS OF HEATED DEBATE, THE ABORTION BILL PASSED 284 TO 189, THANKS TO 179 VOTES OF THE UNITED LEFT. THE GISCARDIAN PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY WAS BADLY DIVIDED.

OVER TWO-THIRDS OF THE UDR VOTED AGAINST THE BILL, THE CENTRISTS WERE EVENLY SPLIT, AND GISCARD'S OWN INDEPENDENT REPUBLICANS VOTED 17 TO 65 AGAINST THE PROPOSAL.

12. WHEN THE DUST HAD SETTLED (THE BILL NOW GOES TO THE SENATE FOR A DECEMBER 13 VOTE AND ALMOST CERTAIN PASSAGE), POLITICAL OBSERVERS ASKED THEMSELVES IF THE DISTRIBUTION OF VOTES ON THE ABORTION BILL PREFIGURED A NEW ALIGNMENT OF FORCES IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, A NEW GISCARDIAN MAJORITY OF LEFT AND REFORM-MINDED CENTRISTS AND GAULLISTS. THE ANSWER IS ALMOST CERTAINLY NO. THE 74 PRO-ABORTION COMMUNIST VOTES ARE UNLIKELY TO JOIN A PERMANENT GISCARDIAN COALITION. NOR DO THE SOCIALISTS INDICATE THAT THEY ARE READY YET TO BREAK THE UNITED LEFT AND HELP GOVERN FRANCE, UNLESS CALLED UPON TO DO SO BY THE RESULTS OF NEW ELECTIONS.

13. BUT THE ABORTION VOTE SUGGESTS THAT GISCARD IS PREPARED, ON EXTRAORDINARY OCCASIONS, TO APPEAL BEYOND HIS OWN COALITION TO A "MAJORITY OF IDEAS" IN THE

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NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, AND THAT SUCH A MAJORITY EXISTS AND CAN RESPOND TO HIM. THIS IS NOT A CAPITAL WHICH CAN BE DRAWN DOWN TOO FREQUENTLY. BUT A PRECEDENT HAS BEEN SET, AND GISCARD MIGHT CHOOSE TO RESORT TO IT AGAIN. GISCARD'S SUCCESS IN PUTTING THROUGH THE ABORTION
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REFORM OVER THE OPPOSITION OF A MAJORITY OF GAULLIST DEPUTIES MAY ALSO SUGGEST THAT HIS RELUCTANCE TO DEVIATE IN ANY IMPORTANT WAY FROM POMPIDOU'S FOREIGN POLICY LINES -- FREQUENTLY ATTRIBUTED TO GAULLIST PARLIAMENTARY CONSTRAINTS -- RESULTS NOT SO MUCH FROM PARTY PRESSURES BUT RATHER MAY REFLECT GISCARD'S OWN CONCEPT OF FRANCE'S BEST INTERESTS.

14. ANOTHER BONUS FOR THE PRESIDENT IS THE PERFORMANCE OF HIS MINISTER OF HEALTH. MADAME VEIL COMPORTED HERSELF WITH STRENGTH AND GRACE, EARNING THE ADMIRATION EVEN OF HER OPPONENTS (ONE OF WHOM LATER PUBLICLY APOLOGIZED FOR HIS INTEMPERATE REMARKS). ONE DEPUTY, RECALLING BEN-GURION'S PRAISE OF GOLDA MEIR, CALLED MADAME VEIL "THE ONLY MAN IN THE GOVERNMENT." HER ABLE PERFORMANCE ENHANCED THE IMAGE OF A GOVERNMENT WHICH, WITH TWO OR THREE EXCEPTIONS LACKS STRONG PERSONALITIES.

15. GISCARD NEEDS TO RECAPTURE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE. ECONOMIC INDICATORS AT MONTHS END WERE DISCOURAGING. PERSISTENCE OF A HIGH RATE OF PRICE INFLATION AND RISING UNEMPLOYMENT IS COSTING GISCARD DEARLY IN PUBLIC SUPPORT. THE REACTION OF WORKERS REMAINS THE CRITICAL ELEMENT. CLEARLY, THE PRESIDENT AND HIS TEAM HAVE THEIR WORK CUT OUT FOR THEM NOT ONLY IN GETTING THE ECONOMY BACK ON THE TRACK, BUT IN RECAPTURING PUBLIC CONFIDENCE.

IT IS CERTAIN THAT GISCARD WILL USE HIS THREE DECEMBER
SUMMIT MEETINGS WITH BREZHNEV, EC HEADS OF GOVERNMENT
AND PRESIDENT FORD AS A MEANS OF BOLSTERING HIS
SOMEWHAT TARNISHED IMAGE AT HOME.
RUSH

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